



Decision Memo

Deer Lake Timber/Wildlife Improvement Project

USDA Forest Service Cuba Ranger District, Santa Fe National Forest Sandoval County, New Mexico

Background

The project area was originally proposed, scoped, and approved in 2007, with implementation occurring through 2008.

In 2008, the category under which the project was categorically excluded was revoked. When the category was revoked, implementation had only been partially completed. The current proposed project has the same actions, affected area, and analyzed effects as was originally scoped in 2007. Specialists have reviewed the current vegetation maintenance purpose and need and the proposed activities and found no effects or extraordinary circumstances discovered that would require new scoping or prevent the use of a categorical exclusion. Based on what was implemented and a review of the existing analysis there are no changes to the analysis and the current decision can be implemented.

Decision

I am approving the Deer Lake Timber/Wildlife Improvement Project located on the Cuba District of the Santa Fe National Forest on lands surrounding the Deer Lake Estates off NM Hwy 126 (see attached map) and the project can proceed as long as the conditions for implementation are met (see Table below).

The project involves vegetation maintenance of an area originally analyzed and treated under the Deer Lake Estates Wildland Urban Interface Hazardous Fuels Reduction Phase II Decision Memo dated August 8, 2007.

This action is needed to improve the health and vigor of the timber stands and wildlife habitat in the project area. The current Deer Lake Timber/Wildlife Improvement Project will consist of the following vegetation maintenance activities on 400 acres of the original project acres:

- Mechanical thinning of 400 acres
- Mastication of 250 acres which involves mechanical thinning and chipping of understory and dense stands of vegetation less than 9" dbh (diameter at breast height)
- Hand thinning and piling of 150 acres of understory and dense stands of vegetation less than 9" dbh
- Pile burning of 150 acres to remove slash and piled vegetation as a result of the hand thinning

This project is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement under Title 36 CFR Part 220.6(e)(6): Timber stand and/or

wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction. This category was chosen because current timber stands in the project area are not at optimal diversity and health, making them susceptible to various negative impacts from diseases, catastrophic fire, etc. The primary purpose of the project is to improve timber stands by increasing the average canopy height through the reduction of ladder fuels, bring back diversity among the age and type of trees present, and reestablish a healthy ecosystem. By improving the timber stand there will be a decreased risk of high intensity wildfire for the Deer Lake Community. Firefighter safety and the effectiveness of emergency fire suppression activities in the event of a wildfire will also increase as a result of these activities. In addition, wildlife habitat will benefit from healthier timber stands. I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species – None
- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – None
- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – None
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – None
- Research natural areas – None
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – None
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – None

Resource	Implementation Condition
Heritage	Condition 1: Prior to any project activities being carried out, heritage staff must be notified in order to flag any sites within the project area so that they can be avoided. Condition 2: Heritage site protection and undocumented find reporting must be included in any contracts.
Wildlife	Condition 1: Prior to any activities being carried out, District Wildlife Biologist will hold a pre-project field meeting to educate crews about identifying and reporting goshawk sightings. In the event of a sighting within the project boundary, the following additional condition will need to be carried out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinning or removal of vegetation will be adjusted to maintain 50%+ and 60%+ canopy cover in mixed-conifer VSS 5/6 respectively Condition 2: If project implementation will be conducted during Goshawk breeding season of



	<p>March 1 – August 30, the District Wildlife Biologist must be notified so goshawk surveys can be completed prior to the start of project activities.</p> <p>Condition 3: these conditions must also be included in any contracts where necessary.</p>
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Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Santa Fe National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. Agency resource specialists were consulted and public involvement for this project included a field visit with Deer Lake community residents and the project was included in the Forest SOPA. Considering the nature and scope of the project, no additional public contact was deemed necessary. No significant issues were raised during scoping.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the Santa Fe National Forest Land Management Plan. The project is located within Forest Plan Management Area “D” (Ecosystem Management Areas from 1987 Forest Plan (amended in 1992, 1997, 2010)) and is consistent with Forest Plan forest-wide and management area goals, direction, and standards and guidelines.

Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

This decision is not subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215.12(f).

Implementation Date

Implementation may begin immediately.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Frank Cisneros, Cuba Ranger District, PO BOX 130, Cuba, NM 87013 or by telephone (505) 289-3264

Jamie Bennett

Cuba District Ranger

12/31/2020

Date



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Deer Lake Timber/Wildlife Improvement Project Cuba Ranger District



